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## on Laura Jensen

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Lurking underneath "On the Wing" are images of a soldier crossing a river and helicopters overhead. It becomes evident in this poem, as well as many of the other poems in the book, that understanding beauty depends on knowing the violence that penetrates everything. The woman in "The Lost Private" is beautiful because of and not in spite of her scars. In "Hotel Florence," the woman's stepping "out of the lit bathroom/Like a small boy in her white pajamas, her rings/ And necklaces cupped in her hands before her" would lose its wonder if the reader didn't know the desperate situations of the two people whose love, however brief, denies desperation. The rare scene that opens "Song of Napalm" is far from innocent; "The grass was never more blue in that light, more/ scarlet."

Violence is assumed in *The Monkey Wars*, whether it is global or domestic or merely the non-interference of the speaker in "Surrounding Blues on the Way Down." But Weigl's well-crafted juxtaposition of beauty with violence and the conditional hope which his poetry maintains in such conditions are extraordinary. The beauty and love that mysteriously engender a desire to have control over it (so perfectly rendered in "Snowy Egret"), are gifts to each of Weigl's poems. And Weigl's poems are gifts to his readers.

-Judith Hiott

## Laura Jensen, *Shelter*; Dragongate, Inc.; Port Townsend, WA., 1985, \$14.00, cloth

I have been a fan of Laura Jensen's since her first full length collection, *Bad Boats*, appeared from Ecco in the American Poetry Series, 1977. *Shelter* is Jensen's third full length collection. She has also published numerous chapbooks and limited editions.

Of *Shelter*, Carolyn Kizer says, (NYTBR, Nov. 3, 1985),

There are at least 15 poems in "Shelter," Laura Jensen's third collection, a book of magical spells, that I long to quote in full. The power of originality here is virtually unique in poets of her generation.

In *Shelter*, Jensen presents the startling, brutal edge of the mundane — all of our ordinary lives. She concedes that to each of us, events have import, isolated

though paradoxically universal. She points to what is lacking, what is needed, that which may never be defined. Yet she doesn't fall prey to condescension, that *here-is-the-answer-you've-overlooked* attitude of some contemporary poets. And this invites the reader in. We are not being judged but observed. Any judgements become ours to make. And Jensen knows we will make them.

Her form is the rhythm of life, succinct and biting. She approaches familiar platitudes, those lines we all know and repeat, but she avoids their definition. She circles our basic needs: food, shelter and water. She stabs at false security. She returns us to the animal world.

Jensen plays on our subconscious, letting *her* words seep upwards to consciousness from within. This makes them powerful, memorable; we wish her words as our own. But it is really her music, the breath of her words that we want to claim. Her words are a cumulative crescendo, like the bread that rises and is baked before we can acknowledge or comprehend the process.

And she creates a curious frame for her book, beginning with "The Storm," and ending with "Shelter." Both are experienced within the ironic sanctity of a personal niche. On the one hand, lives are always dictated by an outsider, the landlord. On the other, it is one's own kitchen that gives warmth. Both are subject to the rules.

*Shelter* is a cohesive cycle of poems. And it is supported by the design of the book itself. Dragongate, Jensen's publisher, should be commended for their confirmation of the artistic nature of Laura Jensen's work through graphics. Reprinted here, with permission, are the opening and closing poems of *Shelter*, with the hope you will read all between.

## THE STORM

In the room with the bed  
 there has not been a dream  
 where your heart is screaming  
 let me wake, let me wake.  
 At the windows trees.  
 At the windows are swallows.  
 On the table are books.  
 On the table are candles.  
 Each little room is clean,  
 and at the door are pansies.  
 And a rosebush down the stairs.

The landlord gave me jasmine  
 in the earth from the ladder  
 when he rebuilt the stair.  
 I water the jasmine.  
 The landlord climbs the stair.  
 Now he asks me to carry

the plants indoors. I lift them  
to newsprint on the kitchen table  
over the clean kitchen floor.

Clouds darken the weather.  
The wind chimes shake and flail.  
In slicker and sou'wester  
on breaking crests the landlord  
storms the paint from the walls  
with a pressurized jet,  
and turns the world over.  
A snowstorm surrounds  
the house in a glass ball,  
my face at the window.  
I think winter is here.

#### SHELTER

I had bread rising in a warm oven.  
I dusted what was left of the flour  
off of and into my jeans  
and went downstairs and opened the door  
for mail. I found  
a woodpecker dead on the threshold.  
A hawthorn berry beside it.

I left it on the kitchen table.

I thought of it looking  
for shelter, coming only into the porch  
to a nest at the corner the door made  
where it met the jamb, the whole of it  
carved with leaves and varnished  
in the summer when the landlord repainted.  
Or flying into the shapes of blowing trees  
in the door window.

And I thought of three tame trees where I walk  
that had brushed my head and filled it with dreams  
that fell in the summer  
to be cut for firewood.

I found a broken shovel  
that sits at the side of the house  
and buried it bare in a break in the clouds.  
Beside the house, under the hawthorn.  
The hawthorn berry beside it.

As I walked back to the stairs  
the box fell open, and chips  
shaped like esses and ees  
flurried out on the wind like flakes of snow.

And I took the bread out of the oven,  
baked now. An oatmeal loaf.

(from *Shelter* by Laura Jensen)

-Bronwyn G. Pughe